CONFERENCE connection
Alabama · Georgia
Mississippi · South Carolina · Tennessee · NW Florida
SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE, UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST

July 15, 2022

A Call to Action from the Conference Minister

by Rev. Kim Wood

Being church is a multifaceted commitment. It requires us to be faithful, serving God, following Christ, and being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit. It compels us to be present, offering care and compassion and loving genuinely. And it calls us to act, responding with the skills, the talents, and the gifts with which God has equipped us to alleviate suffering, participate to bring about justice and equity for all people, and work toward the fullness of God's Kin-dom.

As I shared in a previous article, when Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister of Justice and Local Church Ministries of the United Church of Christ, came to our recent Annual Meeting in Montgomery, AL, she invited us into a dialogue about ministry and being church together. She then moved us from one large conversation into regional discussions, challenging each group to identify a single issue upon which to focus and act. The purpose of this exercise was not to determine the one most important concern for the church, for we know there are many and they are often entangled. Instead, the goal was to invite our congregations and ministry settings to begin the process of coming together for maximum impact by starting with one regional/state need. To provide further encouragement, Rev. Blackmon committed financial support from the UCC National Setting to get each region's team who developed a plan to get started with implementation.

It is time to continue the collaborative work that began at Annual Meeting.

Below are invitations to register for a Zoom work session for each of regions. Each of the original working groups have already adopted a focus which will be utilized to move forward. If you participated in one of the groups at Annual Meeting, please register for the same region. We also ask that designees from congregations and ministry settings who were not represented at this year's Annual Meeting who are willing to help with planning and implementation register for your specific region. On-site and virtual groups for each region will be combined to create one cohesive group. It is my hope that we have representation from all the congregations and ministry settings in each region.

- Alabama/Mississippi - Tuesday, August 16th 6:30 – 8 PM Central Time https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZAqdO6srDwqGdQ4iFf3dhd9o3rXvJkiyp1c
- Georgia – Tuesday, August 23rd 6:30 – 8 PM Eastern Time https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZwtf-2gqjMvH9BBIkqzwOsUBZfxgycdNjpb
- South Carolina – Monday, August 22nd 6:30 – 8 PM Eastern Time https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcofuqtpzwjGdxWln3DnoY9JZRebVB65lx3
- Tennessee – Thursday, August 25th 7 – 8:30 PM Central Time/6 – 7:30 PM Eastern Time https://us02web.zoom.us/meeting/register/tZcvfumurzMoGd39xfziNtp2icE9mVNJIUmB

News from the Conference Office

ONA Task Force To Be Formed

The Southeast Conference Board of Directors is creating a task force to study the possibility of the SECUCC becoming an Open and Affirming Conference. The ONA Task Force will spend the next year creating space for dialogue about what it would mean for the Southeast Conference to become Open and Affirming and exploring what the discernment process looks like for conferences. The Task Force will work with the Board of Directors, the Conference Staff Team, and other entities it finds helpful in gathering and providing information. It will consult with the Open and Affirming Coalition of the United Church of Christ.

Here are some important pieces of information as the ONA Task Force is

being formed and begins its work:

- The Task Force's role is not to lead an ONA discernment process. Instead, it will explore and gather information for consideration.
- Being an Open and Affirming Conference does not require the congregations and ministry settings of that conference to become ONA. Each setting still maintains its ability to determine its own status.
- Only after the Task Force has done its work will we determine whether this is a time for us to enter into a process of discernment about becoming one of the ONA Conferences of the United Church of Christ.

At this time, the Board of Directors is accepting nominations (self or with the consent of the nominee) of individuals interested in serving on the ONA Task Force. Nominations may be submitted by email to kwood@secucc.org for consideration. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the SECUCC Conference Office.

Ecclesiastical Council on July 26 for Thomas Mitchell

The Commission on Ministry of the Southeast Conference Invites you to participate in the Ecclesiastical Council for Thomas Mitchell on July 26 at 7 pm Eastern, 6 pm Central. on Zoom. You can register to attend here. Thomas is a member in discernment with Church of the Savior in Knoxville, TN

Thomas is from Knoxville, TN, and currently resides in Cambridge, MA. In May, he received his Masters of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School, where he focused on faith formation, program development, and public leadership. During his time in divinity school, Thomas served as the Seminarian at Old South Church in Boston and at the United Parish in Brookline. Outside of faith work, his interests are in traveling to visit friends, a never-ending quest for the perfect cup of coffee, and rewatching the Office and Veep.

Clergy Zoom Connections for July

- **An Hour of Conversations and Prayer**
  Tuesday, July 19, 26 - 11:00 a.m. Eastern (10:00 a.m. Central); Zoom: https://zoom.us/j/479440102

- **Live Harp Meditations for Ministers**
  Thursday, July 21 - 1:00 p.m. Eastern (12:00 noon Central)
  20 minutes of meditation with Celtic harp. Silent prayer and reflection following if desired, facilitated by Rev. Jean Norton.
  Zoom: https://zoom.us/j/96976838422
- **Especially for Specialized Ministers**
  Tuesday, July 26 - 9:30 a.m. Eastern (8:30 a.m. Central)
  Zoom: https://zoom.us/j/354744689

Prayer List

We are continuing the process of praying for authorized ministers, congregations, and ministry groups throughout 2022. We encourage you to include these prayer requests in your local church newsletter, share them with your prayer circle, and include them in your own prayers.

Week of July 17

- Forgiving Heart Church; Columbus, GA
- Randy Hammer
- Thomas Query
- Patricia Keeler

Week of July 24

- Spirit of the Cross, Huntsville, AL
- George Hartz
- Will Rabert, Jr
- Marsha Brown

Churches in Transition

First Congregational, Montgomery AL; First Congregational, Savannah GA; Trinity Congregational, Athens AL; Holy Trinity Community Church, Nashville TN; First United Church, Belvidere TN; Pleasant Hill Community Church, Pleasant Hill TN; Peace Congregational, Clemson SC; Deer Lodge Congregational Church, Deer Lodge TN; Brookemeade Congregational, Nashville TN; Rush Memorial, Atlanta GA

News from Our Local Congregations

Light in the Darkness: A Southeast Conference Pastor Gives Witness to Easter

Facing criminal penalties and a devastating loss of essential medical care for their children, four Alabama parents from across the state, joined by two medical providers and Rev. Eknes-Tucker of Pilgrim UCC Church in Birmingham asked a federal court to block SB 184 from taking effect. Here is Paul's personal reflection.

Easter Sunday was odd for me. Most years I connect to the many manifestations of new life and resurrection that the Easter stories proclaim. Easter 2022 didn't work that way. The events happening in Ukraine with the war and the decision of the Alabama legislature and governor to pass a

draconian bill criminalizing those offering care to families with trans children confused my Easter experience. I shared with the congregation of Pilgrim Church that these things happening in our world weighed heavily on me that Easter Sunday. I was not sure why this one was so different, since every Easter happens in the midst of horrible things happening in the world, including the first one. Read the full reflection on our website.

News from the Wider Church

Just Peace in a Southern Context

The Florida Conference of the UCC, in cooperation with the Southern, Southeast and South Central Conferences along with Justice and Local Church Ministries, invites you to join us for "Just Peace in a Southern Context" on Saturday, Aug. 27, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. This virtual event will offer a historical overview, theological grounding, and current examples of why being a Just Peace Church matters today. Guest Speakers will include Rev. Dr. Susan Thistlethwaite, Rev. Geoffrey Black, Sandra Sorensen, and others. The UCC Washington Office and members of the UCC Just Peace Network will share examples of how together we can bring hope for a more just and peaceful tomorrow. There is no cost to attend the event. However, registration is required. Register today!

Making Plans for General Synod in 2023

The General Synod of the United Church of Christ will get back to business a year from now. And it will do so in person. After an all-virtual experience in 2021, the UCC's biennial national meeting will require all voting delegates to be in Indianapolis in 2023. That's according to the Rev. Karen Georgia Thompson, the associate general minister who serves as Synod administrator. Delegates and visitors will meet from June 30 through July 4 at the Indianapolis Convention Center.

A basic website for the meeting is now in place. People will eventually be able to register for Synod and find the agenda and other details there. One key document is already there: the Standing Rules, which guide Synod business and name important deadlines. There's also a place there to sign up for Synod updates.

MID Event Rescheduled

With gratitude for patience and understanding during a time of illness, we are pleased to share that the Member in Discernment Digital Gathering has been rescheduled to August 26-28. Registration for the rescheduled event is now open. "Our Journey: Shameless Audacity" is a time for MIDs to connect with one another, meet the MESA team and other national leaders, and grow in their knowledge of ministry in and on behalf of the United Church of Christ. There is no cost to attend, and this event is open to any MID who has not previously attended a national MID gathering.

UCC Clergywomen Leadership Event

The UCC Clergywomen's Leadership Event has been postponed at least twice during the pandemic, and we are excited to be offering the event this September 27-29 in Decatur, GA. "For Such a Time: To Confront, Connect, and Create at the Intersection of Race and Gender" is open to authorized clergywomen* in the United Church of Christ. Registration is now open for the in-person and online gathering. (* This invitation is expansive to include all cis and trans women as well as non-binary people comfortable in a space that centers the experiences of women.)

Internships announced for African American Women in Ministry's Marketing, Communications & Recruitment program

The National Steering Committee of African American Women in Ministry has agreed to include an internship program for students who are in 11th grade and up. The internship program is a year-long program and encompasses every aspect of marketing and communications. Unfortunately, this is an unpaid internship. Questions or concerns can be directed by email to chantellemonet3@gmail.com. Also, see below a link to the internship application, which will be due on July 31 at 11:59 pm. Application Template for submission

Trainings and Conferences

Virtual National ONA Gathering: still time to register!

Join the Open and Affirming Coalition on Aug. 5-7 for their first National ONA Gathering since 2019! This virtual event will celebrate the 50th anniversaries of the ONA Coalition and Bill Johnson's ordination as the first openly gay man authorized to serve a historic Christian church as a minister of word and sacrament. Leaders include the Rev. Rhina Ramos (worship leader), Bishop Yvette Flunder (closing address and charge), the

Rev. Bill Johnson and the Rev. Anne Holmes, and the Rev. Andy Lang (State of the ONA Movement). Learn more and register on the ONA website.

UCC Retired Servants Retreat

Blowing Rock Conference Center
October 10 - 12 (Mon. - Wed. with optional Sunday arrival)

Presenter: Lerita Coleman Brown (Ph.D.) - retired as the Ayşe I. Carden Distinguished Professor Emerita of Psychology at Agnes Scott College, Decatur, GA. Currently, Brown serves as a spiritual companion/director, writer, retreat leader, and speaker. She says "promoting contemplative spirituality in everyday life, the life and work of Howard Thurman and uncovering the peace in one's heart are what brings me most joy." In addition to academic work, she is a strong advocate of organ and tissue donation and contemplative practices (e.g., solitude, silence, stillness, and living in the present moment). Lerita Coleman Brown was drawn to this way of life because she encountered and survived a number of medical challenges including a heart transplant in 1995, a kidney transplant in 2005 and a valve replacement on her transplanted heart and had a pacemaker implanted in 2006. She considers each day to be a walk of faith and hope.

Conference Calendar

July 19 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT
Clergy Conversations via Zoom

July 21 @ 1:00 pm - 2:00 pm EDT

Live Harp Meditations for Ministers

July 21 @ 6:00 pm - 7:00 pm EDT
Commission on Ministry Meeting

July 26 @ 9:30 am - 11:00 am EDT
Zoom Conversation for Specialized Ministers

July 26 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT
Clergy Conversations via Zoom

July 26 @ 6:00 pm - 7:30 pm EDT
Ecclesiastical Council for Thomas Mitchell

August 2 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT
Clergy Conversations via Zoom

August 9 @ 11:00 am - 12:00 pm EDT
Clergy Conversations via Zoom

August 11 @ 7:00 pm - 8:30 pm EDT
Board of Directors Meeting

View the full calendar of events online: https://www.secucc.org/events/

Contact Us

Conference Minister: **Rev. Kim Wood;** kwood@secucc.org

Assoc. Conf. Minister: **Rev. Heather Fosburgh;** hfosburgh@secucc.org

Generosity Coordinator: **Min. Carrole Moss;** cmoss@secucc.org

Director of Communications: **Don Harris;** dharris@secucc.org

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